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## Translation Strategy Revised: the Communicative-Functional Approach

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*In the article the foundations of the communicative-functional approach to translation are explained, a classification of communicative situations in which translation is used as a professional activity is made, the definition of translation strategy is given and types of translation strategies are established.*

*Keywords: communicative-functional approach, communicative situation, translation strategy, strategy of communicative translation, strategy of tertiary translation, strategy of redirection.*

### 1. Communicative-Functional Approach to Translation

Translation theory is rich in various approaches to translation developed throughout its history. At the initial stages of the formation of translation theory as a science, at least in the Soviet Union, an approach that may be termed as “text-focused” investigation predominated over other approaches if they were existent at all. According to the text-focused approach all problems and difficulties arising in the translation/interpreting process were treated as a natural outcome of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL) collision. Correspondingly, efforts were made to describe the peculiarities of the two languages that “collided” in the translation process as well as to classify various means of solving the problems arising from the lack of correspondence between the language structures. It gave birth to some well-known and recognized classifications of what we now call

“transformations”. Significant in this respect is the statement by Olga Petrova: “While translating one must keep in view typological characteristics of both the languages and remember that the same idea may be expressed lexically in one of them and grammatically in the other” (Petrova, 2006:4-5). True, correspondences between the language structures were also investigated and classified, but still it is the discrepancies between the structures and resulting transformations that were in the focus of attention. The success of the translation activity was seen as dependent upon the degree of craftsmanship with which a translator used transformations.

Later on it dawned upon translation scholars that real translation problems did not arise from the “collision of languages”: they result from the collision of SL and TL *cultures*. Transformations applied in translation must be treated as mere technicalities inherent in the translation process. In the same book Olga Petrova writes: “Besides

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purely linguistic difficulties, translation involves a great number of problems caused by numerous extralinguistic factors” (Petrova, 2006:5). As Daniel Gile formulates it, “the sociological and psychological dimensions of Translation can be considered of paramount importance inasmuch as discourse is modulated both in content and packaging as a function of the Receiver’s characteristics” (Gile, 1991:192). In a somewhat simplified but precise way the idea was formulated by Juliane House: “...Translation is both a linguistic and a cultural activity involving communication across cultures... The “received” view of translation today is that it is first and foremost a process of intercultural change, rather than a kind of cross-linguistic substitution” (House, 2009:71-72). It means that the translation process is not a mere replacement of SL words or structures by TL words or structures and to the use of transformations by a skillful translator. It is rather an act of communication between the “trio” of the author of the source text (ST), the translator and the receivers of the target text (TT). The idea that translation is a means of establishing communication between representatives of different cultures and that a translator is a mediator in communication gave birth to another approach to translation which we call “communicative-functional approach”. According to this approach any act of translation must be viewed in the context of the communication environment that includes the author of the ST, or Sender, the receivers (recipients) of the ST, the translator, and the receivers of the TT (communication actors). Thus, translation is an event associated with another event, i.e. with communication between the author of the ST and ST receivers, if any, and yet with one more event, i.e. with communication between the ST author and the TT receivers (if this communication takes place). According to the same approach the communication environment is not the environment where some

lexical and grammar exercises are done; this is an environment where *human beings act*; thus, translation should be viewed as a human activity in the interests of human beings. Each time, in each situation translation is very personal and individual. Eugene Nida was among the first translation scholars who introduced those personal factors in the translation process as the subject of investigation, thus adding pragmatic factors to the list of factors to be analyzed and humanizing the translation process itself as perceived by students of translation. It is noteworthy that his notion of dynamic (functional) equivalence is a result of applying the communicative-functional approach to translation though Nida himself never used the term. In his own words, “the translation process has been defined on the basis that the receptors of the translation should comprehend the translated text to such an extent that they can understand how the original receptors must have understood the original text” (Waard, Nida, 1986:36). The necessity for TT receivers to understand how ST receivers comprehended the ST and, we shall add, the intention of the ST author is, certainly, one of the most important pragmatic factors inherent in the translation process. “...The pragmatic components incorporated by those advocating a functionalist approach are a welcome addition to translation studies. While many theorists have long suggested that translation theory incorporate extra-linguistic factors in the translation equations, few have found models adequate to the task. The functionalists, however, add cultural factors easily and well. Some of their additions may seem obvious: a client who hires a translator has specific goals that need consideration; the receiving audience has certain expectations that need to be addressed; translation is a form of action, a communicative interaction” (Gentzler, 2001:73).

Daniel Gile is absolutely right when he states that an act of verbal communication occurring in

a professional translation setting is triggered by an aim or intention. He adds that such aims and intentions are multilayered and explains that at the most superficial layer, an act of communication may aim at informing the Receiver of a fact; at deeper layers, it may aim at scoring a point in an intellectual debate through this information, at convincing the Receiver by scoring such points (Gile, 1991:190). Thus, immediate aims behind informational discourse segments can be: informing, explaining, convincing. When the Sender manages to achieve his aim, i.e. to inform, explain, or convince with the help of a mediator, he thinks the communication to be successful. But this is a definition of the communication success only in the Sender's perspective. It is noteworthy that according to some theorists, besides the most obvious communication actors whose aims affect the translation setting, there may be a figure that is not that obscure or mysterious as it might seem. I mean the figure of a Client (let us recall what Edwin Gentzler says about a client and his specific goals that need consideration). I'll now try to prove that the client's goals may ultimately and directly define the translation strategy.

However there is an important thing that I would like to add here: that statement that an act of verbal communication in a professional translation setting is triggered by an aim or intention is true but only partially true. We must find out *whose* aim or intention has triggered a given act of communication in the multilingual environment. In other words, the question always arises, who is the initiator of the translation process? It may be, as Gentzler says, a person, a group, or an institution whose goals or aims may be very different from the source-text author, the target-text receiver, and the translator (Gentzler, 2001:73). Eventually it is the initiator's goal that determines both the character of the translation setting and determines the translation strategy. Using a mathematical term, I preliminarily

state that translation strategy is a function of the translation setting, which, in its turn, is a function of the initiator's goal.

We may conclude that according to the communicative-functional approach to translation: 1) translation must be treated as a professional activity performed in a certain setting (situation); 2) goals, aims and intentions of communication actors (including those who represent the TL culture) must be taken into account by a translator in order to choose an appropriate translation strategy.

## **2. Classification of Communicative Situations**

The above explanation is meant to show that translation is done in a certain communicative situation that can be also termed as a "translation activity setting". It goes without saying that communicative situations in which translation is used as a professional activity (CST) are manifold and diverse. I would go as far as to say that each CST is unique in its character due to the uniqueness of each constituent of CST (communication actors, texts, relations between the communication actors, their goals, intentions and expectations).

Despite the striking diversity of CSTs it is still possible to divide them into certain types and subtypes using an appropriate criterion. In my view the purpose can be served by such a criterion as the degree to which translation is planned in a given communicative situation. In fact, all CSTs can be divided into two types, or classes: 1) CSTs in which translation is initially planned; 2) CSTs in which translation was not initially planned. Accordingly, we shall name them as CST-1 and CST-2. Thus, in a CST-1 translation is used as a means of establishing communication between the Sender of the ST and the audience of the TL. The Sender addresses his/her text directly to the audience that belongs to

the target language culture, but it is obvious that communication between the Sender and the target audience can be successful only if translation of the ST is made. CST-2 is a communicative situation in which a text is initially addressed by the Sender to the audience of the same language (source language). As I have said translation is not initially planned, for it is not required to establish communication between the Sender and the target audience (Receiver); translation is made *after* the communication between the two has been established, maybe many years after, and in a different setting and culture.

Diversified as they might be all CSTs are characterized by *common* primary and secondary parameters, which makes it possible to unite them into certain subtypes. Among the *primary parameters of a CST* we find 1) the type of the translation initiator and his role in the CST, 2) the goal of translation, 3) the relations between the communication actors (formal/informal), 4) the environment in which the non-verbal activity is performed by the communication actors. Among the secondary parameters of a CST we can mention 1) the contact between the communication actors (direct/indirect), 2) the form of contact (written or oral), 3) location of the communication actors (distant/contact). A combination of particular primary and secondary parameters determines the character of a given CST and allows to class it as a certain type and subtype since the number of such combinations is finite.

Let us illustrate it with a communicative situation that belongs to CST-1 type. This is a situation of contract supervision, i.e. a type of work aimed at the adjustment of imported equipment at site and performed by specialists who speak different languages. The primary parameters of this CST include:

- *the translation initiator*: a company's management whose role is to organize the exchange of information between

specialists so that they can ensure adjustment of the equipment and its effective operation;

- *the goal of translation*: to ensure the exchange of information between the specialists;
- *relations* between the communication actors are formal;
- environment of performing the non-verbal (professional) activity: a personal meeting required to perform actions jointly.

The secondary parameters of the situation of contract supervision are as follows:

- *type of contact* between the communication actors – direct;
- *form of contact* – oral;
- *location* of the communication actors – contact.

All communicative situations of CST-1 type may be subdivided into two classes: CST-1 of formal nature and CST-1 of informal nature (CST-1<sub>formal</sub> and CST-1<sub>informal</sub> respectively). It is interesting that the character of relations between communication actors has nothing to do with the formal/informal character of a communicative situation. It is the situation itself, the setting in which a professional activity is performed, that is characterized as either formal or informal; in other words, the degree to which a situation is formal is inherent in the situation itself regardless of the type of relations between the communication actors. For example, the relations of two university professors, or, to be more precise, their behavior will be strictly formal in the situation of a meeting of the department or school members and will be informal in the situation of a party organized to celebrate the end of the academic year. True, communication in these situations is monolingual, but the same applies to situations of bilingual communication.

- CST-1<sub>formal</sub> situations are subdivided into the following subtypes:
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-official meetings and negotiations;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-public presentations;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-interviews;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-roundtables;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-contract supervision;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-guided tours;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-attendant interpreting service;
- CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-documentation translation.
- CST-1<sub>informal</sub> situations are very hard to subdivide into any subtypes as the number of such situations is infinite.

It is noteworthy that in all but one CST-1<sub>formal</sub> situations interpreting is used as a means to establish communication between a ST author and the audience or interlocutor speaking another language. In CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-documentation translation the nature of the situation does not differ from that of other CST-1<sub>formal</sub>: a text in written form (e.g., diplomatic or commercial correspondence) is not intended for the SL audience but instead is directly addressed to the TL audience. The difference in secondary parameters of situations does not affect the nature of CST-1<sub>formal</sub>-documentation translation. It should be noted that though a ST exists in written form translation itself can be made both in writing and orally, i.e. both translation proper and interpreting (e.g., sight translation) may be used.

Another criterion for subdivision is used in relation to CST-2 situations (in which translation was not initially planned and is not viewed as a means to establish communication between the ST author and the TT receivers). The interaction that occurs in such situations is not an interaction of the kind we see in CST-1; it is not an interaction between human beings, it is rather an interaction between the TT and its audience, though the TT can be treated as

a representation of the ST author's ideas and intentions.

What makes CST-2 situations different, i.e. belonging to different subtypes, is the role of the translation initiator, or, to be more precise, the goal the initiator pursues while performing his professional activities. Initiator types are not numerous: translation can be initiated by 1) the ST author himself, 2) the TT recipient, 3) the client who actually "buys" the translation, or places an order for translation, 4) the translator. Depending on who exactly initiates translation activity we may postulate the existence of four CST-2 subtypes: 1) CST-2<sub>author</sub>, 2) CST-2<sub>recipient</sub>, 3) CST-2<sub>buyer</sub>, 4) CST-2<sub>trans</sub>. In each of these situations translation is used by the translation initiator as a means to achieve the goal of his professional activity or to satisfy his needs.

What we call CST-2<sub>author</sub> is better known as author's translation, i.e. translation made by the author of the original. V.Nabokov's translation of his "Lolita" from English into Russian and Joseph Brodsky's translations of his own poetry from Russian into English may exemplify the situation. In this case the goal of the translation initiator is, apparently, to broaden the readership and to produce a certain communicative effect on those who originally were unable to have such experience.

CST-2<sub>recipient</sub> is a communicative situation in which a prospective recipient of the TT initiates translation as a means to satisfy his needs. For example, a person can ask a translator to render the text of an operation manual for a car or fridge into his native tongue to be able to understand it better or just to comprehend it at all. The TT is not intended for any third party, it serves the interests of its recipient(s) only.

Quite different is the situation when a person initiates translation without any intention to use it as a recipient (CST-2<sub>buyer</sub>). The TT is not expected to satisfy his/her personal needs, it must be a

tool of achieving the goal of his/her professional activity. For example, the director of a publishing house makes an order for a translation of a book of fiction, but he does it not to enjoy the masterpiece, he does it for a purely commercial reason – to draw profit for his company. In another situation of the same subtype a person might ask to translate a proxy issued in Russian into English in order to submit the translated document to, say, Australian authorities. Obviously, the buyer of the TT cannot be treated as a prospective recipient of it, its reader (though he/she may read it if he/she has some command of the TL): the translation is intended for the authorities of another country where the buyer has some business and where he/she wants to achieve some goal through submitting a translated document.

CST-2<sub>trans</sub> situations occur when a translator highly appreciates the virtues of the original text, its quality and universal value, which prompts him/her to translate the text into another language. Thus, the translation is initiated by the translator, and the obvious goal of the translator is to make humanity happy with something that originally was known only to a small part of it, or to share his delight with others. To be less ironical, I should say that it is the significance of the text (fiction or a public speech) and its universal value that make the translator think that the text not only deserves being translated but must be translated. Suffice it to recall four Russian translations of the famous Gettysburg Address of Abraham Lincoln, each made at the translator's initiative.

### 3. Translation Strategy: Definition

Translation strategy as a notion belongs to the most mysterious categories of the translation theory. Due to its mysterious character it is ambiguous in its meaning. Many definitions of translation strategy offered by various translation scholars range from the broadest definitions possible to the most specific ones. Some define

translation strategy as “the art of translation or a program of the translator's behavior” while others use the term in the meaning of “a way or method of rendering a certain linguistic unit from one language to another”. In the latter meaning the term is synonymous to “a means of translation” or even “a transformation” (e.g., “strategies of rendering abbreviations”). Describing translation strategy as a notion Lawrence Venuti states that “strategies of translation involve the basic tasks of choosing the foreign text to be translated and developing a method to translate it” (Venuti 2005:240). He differentiates between two strategies of translation: domestication and foreignizing. “...Domestication involves an adherence to domestic literary canons both in choosing a foreign text and in developing a translation method” (Venuti 2005:241). In its turn “foreignizing entails choosing a foreign text and developing a translation method along lines which are excluded by dominant cultural values in the target language” (Venuti 2005:242). I can hardly support the idea of defining a translation strategy on the basis of conformity of the chosen translation method to the domestic literary canons or, vice versa, on the basis of whether the method resists the canons. Moreover, Venuti's definition excludes a great number of situations in which non-literary translation is made. Thus, what Venuti sees as two principal strategies of translation is, in fact, two specific varieties of translation strategy. Venuti's Achilles' heel is that in his concept he ignores many circumstances in which translation may be performed, neglects particular features of a CST which affect the choice of a translation strategy that is appropriate to this CST.

To give a definition of translation strategy that would be applicable to all possible communicative situations it is necessary to take into account an obvious fact that translation is an *activity* performed in a certain environment. Translation

is not a philological exercise, it is a practical means to satisfy the specific needs of communication actors. Translation as an activity should meet the requirements of the given environment, of the given setting in which translation is performed. Thus, translation strategy implies forming the translator's behavior program in the given CST, and formulating the goal of translation.

*Translation strategy is, thus, a general program of the translator's activity worked out on the basis of the general approach to translation in a specific communicative situation (CST), determined by the particular parameters of the situation and the translation goal and, in its turn, determining the character of the translator's professional behavior.*

It is obvious that analyzing a CST is inseparable from working out, or choosing an appropriate translation strategy. In fact, the first questions the translator is supposed to ask are "When, where, why and for whom I translate?" and "What results should be achieved by means of translation?". The answers to the questions would help the translator understand the nature of the CST. Thus, situation awareness is the first stage in the process of choosing a translation strategy. Other stages include formulating the translation goal, forecasting and programming. Technically, formulating a translation goal coincides with situation awareness; to formulate the translation goal the translator should understand the nature of the situation he/she is in, to take into consideration the expectations of the communication actors. It is most appropriate to recall here the notion of the translation brief born in skopos-theory. As Ch. Nord defines it, "it is the translation brief (with its specification of addressed audience, time and place of reception etc.) that determines which items from the ST offer of information has to be transferred in the translation process" (Nord 2011:61). Forecasting includes working out the assumptions of how

the CST can change in future (a possibility of misunderstandings and conflicts between the communication actors, of production difficulties, etc.) and assumptions of how the communication actors would react to the translation. Since the translation brief and translation goal dictate what results should be achieved the translator programs the translation activity in such a way as to ensure the desired results. Thus, the programming stage gains certain significance as it is the stage where a form of translation is chosen (as Ch. Nord formulates it: "...the translator would first choose between one of these types and then decide on the specific form that would best suit the translation purpose" (Nord 2011:64)) and, which is even more important, the character of the translator's professional behavior is determined. It should be borne in mind that the goal of translation can differ from the goal of the initial communication actors, and so the translator plans actions that would help him achieve the goal of translation, and this planning is done at the programming stage.

The translator's mental activities at the four stages specified above result in a certain translation strategy.

#### **4. Translation Strategies: Typology**

It is possible to differentiate between three translation strategy types the choice of which depends upon the character (parameters) of a CST.

1) *The strategy of communicative translation.* This type of translation strategy may be defined as the program of translation activity aimed to ensure the communicative effect desired and required by the ST author. The strategy of communicative translation is most appropriate in CST-1 as well as in some varieties of CST-2.

As I have already stated CST-1 includes a number of situations in which the ST author and the TT receiver(s) communicate directly in the

environment of their common professional activity (examples include presentations, interviews, contract supervision, attendant interpreting service, etc.). It should be noted that there is no communication between the ST author and the ST receivers as such receivers do not exist: the text in the SL is addressed directly to those who speak the TL, and the goal is to produce a *certain* communicative effect (to inform, explain or convince, to arouse feelings and emotions, etc.). Thus the program of the translator's professional activity, of the future actions and operations, is intended to ensure the effect desired and expected by the ST author.

In CST-2<sub>author</sub> the strategy of communicative translation is used for the same purpose. The ST author, being the initiator of the translation process, intends to enlarge the audience of the ST and wishes that the TT would produce the same communicative effect as is produced by the ST. Specific examples of translations of the kind have been given above.

In CST-2<sub>recipient</sub> the translation activity is initiated by a prospective recipient of the TT, and the recipients' needs must be satisfied by means of translating the ST. It should be noted that the strategy of communicative translation is applicable only to those CST-2<sub>recipient</sub> situations in which a non-literary texts and text that do not belong to the genre of political journalism are used as means of communication. The information contained in such a text (an official document, a technical specification, a scientific text) must be transferred to satisfy the professional or personal needs of the recipient. In fact, the recipient is interested in the information, in the ideas contained in the ST, and the desired effect is the one that has been produced by the ST upon the SL receivers.

The same is partially true for CST-2<sub>buyer</sub>: the strategy of communicative translation is not applicable to translating social and political

essays. But it is quite applicable to translating literary texts and scientific prose. What makes this situation different from the previous one is the fact that the translation activity is initiated by a third person whose professional needs should to be satisfied. The initiator does not belong to the communication actors, and does not intend to perform the role of the immediate receiver of the TT. Yet, the initiator's intention is to receive the text that would help accrue some benefits. For example, a publishing house may order a translation of a novel, an importer of foreign-made equipment may order a translation of the operation manual. It is obvious that in these cases the function of a text must not change, that is why we can say that the strategy of communicative translation is the only appropriate strategy in such situations.

In CST-2<sub>trans</sub> it is the translator who initiates the translation process. And again social and political essays are excluded from the list of texts to which the strategy of communicative translation is applicable. As I can hardly imagine a situation in which the translator is marveled by a technical text to such an extent that he decides to translate it, the only type of text which can become the object of translation made in accordance with the strategy of communicative translation is a literary text.

2) *The strategy of tertiary translation.* This translation strategy can be defined as a program of translation activity aimed at satisfying the needs of a third person who plays a role that differs from the role of the initial communication actors and whose goal is not in line with their goals. The term "tertiary translation" has been offered by Mikhail Zwilling (Zwilling 1991) to denote the type of translation which is made at the initiative of a person who is interested in the content of the initial communication and in using its effect for his own purposes. Zwilling exemplifies this type translation by a case of radio



interception, or radio intelligence. Sure, this is a comparatively rare case but it also presents a certain communicative situation, specifically: CST-2<sub>buyer</sub>. In this situation the buyer who is the initiator of the translation process can order a translation of a highly specialized text (as is the case with radio interception) or a text of social or political essay (for example, a speech made by a foreign politician addressed to his nation) in order to publish it in another country.

The same strategy may be used in CST-2<sub>trans</sub>. It is the case when the translator impressed by the virtues of a political essay or presentation takes a decision to translate it (e.g., “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King). It is typical of this situation that the effect produced by the TT cannot be the same as the effect produced by the ST: the translation is perceived in another country, by a quite different ethnic community, many years after the ST was created. The TT serves the purpose which the ST never served. While translating, the translator will implement the program that would be different from the program of communicative translation.

3) *The strategy of redirection.* The strategy of redirection is a general program of translation activities aimed at producing a target text addressed to an audience with different social characteristics (as compared with the ST

audience). It goes without saying that the same communicative effect is not desired, expected or planned when the strategy of redirection is applied. Situations of the kind do not have many varieties but occur quite frequently in reality. We can presume that, for example, a theatre director asks a translator to translate a play because he wants to know whether the play stages well. Another example: a publishing house wants the translator to simplify the novel, to get rid of philosophical thoughts and ideas to make the book attractive for a great number of readers, not only sophisticated elite. In these situations (CST-2<sub>recipient</sub> in the first case and CST-2<sub>buyer</sub> in the second one) nobody expects a similar communicative effect: the goal of translation differs from the goal of the ST author, the TT is addressed to the audience with other social characteristics, the text is *redirected*.

At the same time I cannot say that the strategy of redirection resembles very much that of tertiary translation. In fact, what units them is the nature of the communicative effect produced on the TT audience: it is different from the one intended when the strategy of communicative translation is applied. In all these cases the communicative situations are different, the translation goals are different and, thus, the translation strategies should be different too.

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## **Новый взгляд на стратегию перевода: коммуникативно-функциональный подход**

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*В статье обсуждаются основы коммуникативно-функционального подхода к переводу, предлагается классификация коммуникативных ситуаций с использованием перевода, предлагается определение стратегии перевода и дается классификация стратегий перевода.*

*Ключевые слова: коммуникативно-функциональный подход, коммуникативная ситуация, стратегия перевода, стратегия коммуникативно-равноценного перевода, стратегия терциарного перевода, стратегия переадресации.*

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